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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the technique of role-switching as a workable field relationship tactic in the observer's work site. It describes the nature of subject use of the observer's dual status during the research activity, and conceptualizes the relationship between this type of researcher-role management and the premise of role reciprocity in field research. Based on examples from a field study of black undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, it describes instances of role switches from researcher to University official in response to the social developmental or academic interests and needs of some of the research subjects. Most prominent among these role switches were counselor, informant and collaborator, and teacher. Examples of subject-initiated encounters with the observer that incite unexpected dimensions of field relationships in the typical study process are briefly recounted in order to lay the foundation of this paper's essential theme. (PN)

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'Switching Hats' in Participant Observation

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Abstract

Role Boundaries and Paying Back: 'Switching Hats' in Participant Observation

Researcher-role in participant observation is a primary ingredient in field study methodology for determining what the observer will be able to learn. Most of the literature about field studies give useful counsel to researchers about establishing and maintaining good field relationships.

Yet, this aspect of field study methodology is generally focussed on from a prospective of the typical participant observer process -- i.e., the one-time observer who initiates, proceeds, completes the study, and then leaves the site. Rarely does the reader find methodological guidance for researcher-role taking that emanate from studies conducted in settings where the observer is employed and carries another distinct, official role.

This paper focuses on the technique of role-switching as a workable field relationship tatic in the observer's work site. It describes the nature of subject use of the observer's dual status during the research activity, and conceptualizes the relationship between this type researcher-role management and the premise of role reciprocity in field research.

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subject use of field researcher

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Introduction

Researcher-role in participant observation has received considerable attention in the literature about field study methodology. Most of these works give useful counsel for establishing and maintaining good field relationships, detail recurrent problems encountered by the observer, proffer analysis of the sources of these problems, recount expedients that have succeeded in certain situations, and underline mistakes to be avoided (McCall and Simmons, 1969). The related literature emphasizes that researcher-role and field relationships (during the initiation stage of the study as well as throughout the life of it) are primary ingredients for projecting what the observer will be able to learn (see Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955; Rieken, 1956; McCall and Simmons, 1969: Chapters 2, 4, and 5; and Schatzman and Strauss, 1973: Chapter 3). Reference works tell of involvements between the observer and the observed that explicate salient themes relevant to conceptualizations of researcher-role, issues of role choices, and the dynamics of field relationships. The reader becomes poignantly aware that such matters are paramount concerns motivating the observer's ability to create and sustain a stance of an object scientist producing a study that is naturalistic, emergent, non-preordinate, contextual, and holistic (Harvey, 1982).

However, field work foci on researcher-role and field relationships are generally exemplified from a prospective

of the typical observer--i.e. the one-time participant who initiates, proceeds, completes the study, and then leaves the site. Rarely does the reader find methodological guidance for researcher-role taking that emanate from studies conducted in settings where the observer is employed and carries another distinct, official role. This role duality engenders specialized tactical and structural features (as well as some role-definition dilemmas) that have important implications for the field research process. In addition to developing and utilizing skills associated with entry, access, data collection practices, and human relationship strategies, the observer is also compelled to devise means for appropriately "switching hats" in conjunction with the dual functioning in the field.

This paper focuses on the technique of role-switching as a workable scheme in the home site. It highlights the nature of subject use of the observer's dual status during the research activity, and conceptualizes the relationship between this stance and the premises of role reciprocity in field research. This paper is based on examples from my field study of Black undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) where I am employed as a student affairs administrator and a member of the faculty in one of the graduate schools. It describes instances of my role switches from researcher to University official in response to the social developmental or academic interests and needs of some of the research subjects. Most prominent

among these role switches were counselor, informant and collaborator, and teacher. Examples of subject-initiated encounters with the observer that incite unexpected dimensions of field relationships in the typical study process are briefly recounted in order to lay the foundation of this paper's essential theme.

Subject - Use of the Field Relationship: Some Typical Accounts

Much of the related literature reflect that the participant observer may mount several strategies for establishing field relationships and pursuing data collection -- e.g. the announcement of auspices and sponsorship, the choice of the role, and the selection of the initial subjects. Tactices that actualize where the observer can go, what she can see, what she can do, whom she can interact with, what she can inquire about, and what she can be told are explicit considerations that are usually designed in the study's formal format. The observer generally seeks to organize her study in ways that concisely determine the kinds of data to be collected and the management of human relationship factors central to her scientific concerns. Such determinations best pilots the observer's legitimate role behaviors in the field and mobilizes the human action of carefully selected, well positied plans of the observer's role management strategies framing the study's thrust.

Yet, several documents chronicling this research thrust reveal a concurrent human action (perhaps almost equally imbued with carefully selected, well posited stances) on the part of subjects that also manifest the nature of the observer's role in the field. Subjects frequently utilize their interactions with the observer for reasons not expressed in the purposes of the study. On their own initiative subjects will shape and use the observer as she relates to their interests and needs, and will assimilate

her involvement with them to that end (Gold, 1958). The observer, then, may become someone, at least from her subjects' point of view, far different from that of her formally established role. She may find herself embroiled (albeit, for a relatively brief time in most research examples) in carrying other unacknowledged roles as she proceeds her study. The observer is thus faced with explicitedly responding to the unanticipated demands and interests of her subjects which supply a myriad of reactions and involvements. While such instances may (and often do) foster the retrival of substantive data previously unevisioned in the initiation stages of the study, they more readily promote the factor of role-reciprocation—i.e. that process of mutual obligation between the observer and subjects — as a hightened entity within the research activity.

The field relationship between observer and observed is a strong social tie. It is embodied with a powerful profusion of investigative arrangements that both parties are likely to be affected, to some degree, for the remainder of their lives. Even as the observer employs all of her carefully thought out, conceptually based strategies underpinning her formally defined role in the field, she will not be able to avoid an expectation by her subjects that a reward is forthcoming, in some way, that makes their roles as subjects of research self-fulfilling. As reference materials suggest, the observer cannot expect to be only on the receiving end of the participant observer process, and she must

straightforwardly consider what kinds of rewards she can afford to provide her subjects--i.e. rewards that will not ordinarily prejudice or jeopardize the observer's overall relations with subjects; but, rewards that can be viewed by all parties concerned as ones that are fairly distributed, and are of sufficient value to compensate them in some measureable sense for their time and cooperation (see Wax, 1952; Gusfield, 1955; Cannell and Axelrod, 1956; and Rieken, 1956). Yet, subjects' quests for extended involvements with the observer in matters beyond the stated purview of the fundamental attentions of the research may be, in fact, a quest for role reciprocity as they define and need it.

Harvey (1982), in her field study focussing on the evaluation of an innovative public school program in Trinidad, elaborated on the multi-perceptions of her research stance other than that formerly enunciated in her official character as a program evaluator. Through these role perceptions, Harvey found herself embarked on unforeseen courses of relationships with her subjects. For example, she was a bridger of communication gaps between subjects who previously had no formal mechanism for sharing professional knowledge and expertise; an articulator of problems and suggestor of solutions among subjects who expressed a desire and/or need for ways to improve professional performance in the setting; and a theraputic listener to the stresses and frustrations sufiered by subjects who needed "talking-it-through" expereinces with an objective,

non-threatening other.

As Harvey yielded to these kinds of interactive demands from her subjects, she was able to well satisfy their immediate interpersonal needs to have a fresh viewpoint and an empathic response to their individual and collective status in the setting regardless of the impact that the innovative program (of which they were originally being queried about and observed in) had on them. Harvey's ability to suspend any preconceived adherence to her formal observer role characterization made it possible for her subjects to use other aspects of her researcher presence in their lives to bring to light their own needs and interests. As such, a unique form of role reciprocation was effected thus prompting a greater facilitation of the observer's acquisition of data specifically relevant to the study.

Olsen and Whittaker's study (1980) of student nurses provided an extensive discussion of the expansion of their researcher roles as the "ultimate reality" presented by their subjects. They became multifacet personalities in the lives of their subjects. They acted as friends to some subjects when they engaged in a variety of informal social activities; as advisors when they were pressed to give counsel on problems confronting some of the subjects; as social catalyzers when they facilitated subject-to-subject interactions such as luring an unsuspecting student to her suprise bridal shower, officiating at pinning ceremonies, and portraying patients in laboratory classes; and as

"omnicient" individuals when they were asked to evaluate such matters as the worth of classes and the intellectual sophistication of course content, or to give refined, expert opinions about certain traditions of the nursing school. The researchers' capitulation of their subjects' use of them beyond the study's scope fostered unexpected reciprocal connections with the subjects' world and spurred complementary commitments to the basic intentions of the research.

Anderson's study (1978) of lower-income Black men who frequented a bar and liquor store on the south-side of Chicago revealed that his on-going relationship with his subjects spawned certain role arrangements apart from his formal stance as an outsider learning about the social order of these men. On many occasions, Anderson's field relationship with some of his subjects was a source of their rapport with others internal and external to the study site. Anderson's acquienscence to the role dimensions of his researcher presence in the setting benefitted his ability to attain massive amounts of data important to the study's guiding hypothesis and theoretical perspectives (see Chapter 2). More significantly, however, Anderson's deep sense of mutual obligations permeated his overall findings; thereby, helping to validate the propiety of established field-work methodological notions that role-reciprocity is an ethically sound factor in research.

Switching Hats

As A Legitimate Researcher-Role Management Technique

The preceeding discussion briefly denoted the multi-dimensional features of participant observation and highlighted various subject-uses of field relationships as was experienced by some researchers. The few examples cited pointed out the significance of these role diversions relative to the appropriateness of the concept of research reciprocity. These examples help confirm that the work of data collection in the field does not take place in a vacuum. The perspectives and perceptions of the social realities in the setting are shaped by the social positions and interests of both the observed and the observer as they live through a passing present (Vidich, 1955). Accordingly, the intereactions between observer and subjects are always infused with some measure of shared responsibility to each other's needs that surface in a variety of ways. This perspective is quite useful for undergirding the behaviors of observers in all aspects of the field research enterprise, and it offers unique avenues for studying the subjects' vision of things in their social world.

However, the precepts guiding reasonable responses for the observer's role taking associated with subject use of the research relationship are generated by typical examples of field work and do not tender a concise frame of reference for the atypical observer studying a social issue in a setting where she also wears another hat. The related

literature is generally devoid of conceptual propositions that explicate techniques for managing this dual role functioning as a necessary reality in this sort of research endeavor. The observer who elects to conduct a study in her home field, then, must create her own approaches of responding to some of the competing pressures resulting from this relatively unusual position. Importantly, the technique the observer develops to this end must be discharged in a manner that best preserves the scientific and professional integrity of both role stances.

In my case as a researcher studying the world of Black undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, I soon discovered that my status as an administrator and faculty member required conscientious tactics for balancing my double standing on the campus. Initially, I came to my field work with some apprehension about my role duality since I had no access to related literature to use as a major guiding force for consistently strategizing against potential role-confusions that might occur in my participant observation. I was well known by a few of my subjects due to my primary employment as a student life officer carrying certain responsibilities for some of the organizations in which they belonged. Other subjects knew me by reputation because of the student advocacy role I performed in behalf of the interests of the entire undergraduate population at Penn generally, and of Black students particularly. I clearly regarded my administrative status as having both

positive and negative implications for my study's development and progression. On the one hand, I took advantage of my official relationships with some Black students to inaugurate Black student participation in the study and to gain entry into their world. The trust and acceptance of some of the Black student leaders due to my official involvement, albeit somewhat minimal, in their political and organizational life on the campus was utilized in the effort to more readily acquire generalized Black-student-sanctioning of this study as well as to enhance my ability to more diligently voice to any Black student participant that the study's true purpose was to accurately (as best as possible) explore, record, and make sense of their lives in the Penn environment.

But on the other hand, I was concerned that my status as a member of the University administration could cause some Black students to mistrust the intentions of the study and feed a tendency to guard against being exploited and used as a source of data for the development of social science theories that would not offer any particular benefit to them (see Willie, 1972). Moreover, the year's time of this study's life saw a brief but intense period when several Black students (especially student leaders) were besieged with death threats, overt racial slurs and other forms of harassment by white student assailants. Additionally, a residence hall housing a large number of Black students was the focal point of constant calls of

bomb-scares, and the building was often defaced by garbage and trash missile from windows in the adjacent dormitory and a nearby fraternity house (both of which were predominantly populated by white students residents), and was spray-painted with racially derogatory statements and ephitets.

These incidents caused me to withdraw some of the time I originally planned to use in the field as a researcher and rendered my high visibility as an administrator who had some official tasks associated with the investigation and cessation of these occurences. The technique of switching hats from researcher to University official was heavily utilized during this period in order to optimally effect the specially suited performance of both roles (in their individually proper appearances) in the setting. I had to openly convey to my subjects when I was in the dormitories (especially the Black residence hall) and other major places of their student life as either the researcher or the University administrator.

For example, on some occasions when I entered the dormitory on an official matter I would be approached by distraught students requesting that I interview them so that the story of their lives "in this hell-hole" could be told. While I was sometimes tempted to seige this opportunity to record a very emotionally charged account of the life situation of Black students at Penn, I always resisted this turn of events, and, instead, maintained my administrative role through suggesting that such

students meet with me in my office to discuss their fears and feelings of indignation.

At other times when I would enter a Black student gathering at the student union hall or sit down at their usually inhabited tables in a dining hall to collect data for the study, I would encounter hushed discussions or scenes of guarded statements and superficial comments. I relied heavily on the trust and confidence I had from the various student supporters of this research to help me traverse this kind of reception. On several occasions, I solicited their help in my attempt to communicate that whatever I heard or saw as a researcher or as an official during this period (and at any other time, for that matter) would be handled discreetly and fairly. Once, a student objected to my presence at an informal discussion about an incident of a racial confrontation between a white male student and a Black female student in one of the dorm elevators. Some of the men were making statements about their desire ~~and~~ to physically acoast the white student assailant. As I was about to relent to the objection and take my leave, one of my student sponsors stated:

> Aw man, cool out. Jacqui's O.K. She hates this shit as much as we do. Anyway, you just talkin', you ain't go' do nothin'.

This was, and remains, my favorite of the comments made that sanctioned my participant observation in Black students' domains. Fortunately, I did not bear witness to anything that would have compelled me to officially handle or report

-- e.g., students seriously planning to commit (or actually exercising) acts that would be regarded as criminal in retaliation to these racially demeaning happenings. If I had, I am confident that I would have watched the situation closely, offered what I considered as more appropriate and socially acceptable behavioral alternatives (in terms of the University's code of social conduct). Restrospectively, this would have probably been the one occasion where my dual capacity would have been almost indistinguishalbe. I am convinced that this behavioral choice is appropriately interchangeable when one confronts this kind of circumstance.

While this rather trying period (both for me and my subjects) evidenced the greatest amount of the two-fold role activity ingrained in my research, it did not minimize the necessity to continuously fine tune this technique as a critical piece of my total role management style in the field. From the first stages of this study through its completion, I was, at times, held to a series of characterizations by some of my subjects that signified my need to switch hats in the research context. The following illustrations portray some of the distinct porperties of these role shifts and convey guidelines derived from them.

The Observer as Counselor

There were occasions, primarily during my taped interview sessions with students, where some of the subjects' process of reflection and explanation about their lives at Penn generated a specific problem with which they were struggling. Ostensibly both the individual student and I had an outwardly spoken agreement that I was then in her company for certain matters and issues relative to the interests of my study. Yet, the nature of my questions and my pursuit for indepth knowledge about the subject's background, aspirations, relationships with others, and other aspects of her sojourn through the Penn system sometimes propelled us in the respective roles of counselor and counselee. In these cases, I found myself instinctively responding to the students' needs to be listened to in a manner clearly beyond the purposes of the interview. It became quite apparent to me that the student seized an opportunity to try to work-through some trouble which, perhaps, had been brought to surface by my probing, ethnographic interview. At that point, I became not an interviewer in relationship with the student as a subject of research. Rather, I was readily utilized as someone whom the student chose to regard as a person who could help with a problem. Accordingly, I switched hats and reacted to the sounds of a student at some level of personal distress as I would have had the problem been brought to my attention in my office.

The following excerpt from an interview with a female junior exemplifies the quality of the role switch to counselor/counselee:

Interviewer: ...it sounds like you've had a a pretty interesting three years here at Penn. I really thank you for taking the time to tell me about it.

Student: Yes, it has been interesting but now I don't know how 'pretty'.

Interviewer: Oh, is there more?

Student: (in a low tearful tone of voice) Well, lately I've been worrying about myself and I've been doing a lot of thinking about myself. I mean, all of my life I've thought of myself as a person who judged people as individuals and not by the color of their skin, and I've always thought that other people judged me that way too.

Interviewer: I hear something more there. What's the matter?

Student: Well, lately with all that mess at DuBois and everything, I find myself really hating white people ...Most of my friends are white. How can I really hate them? But I feel that I do...I can't help myself, I must be becomong a racist or something. I'm really obsessed with this thing now.....

Interviewer: Can you describe what you're feeling?

Student: I don't know, it's really hard to put into words.

Interviewer: Try? Take your time, I can stay longer....

The student began to pour out her feelings of confusion, self-conflictiveness, and fears associated with her generalized anger towards whites as related to her knowledge

of the racial harassment confronting many Black students on the campus. Although this student felt that she had never experienced any form of such harassment, she revealed that she had been "struggling for weeks" with a sense of identification with the plight of students who had. It was evident that my requests for details about this student's ways of interacting in the Penn setting stimulated her need to engage in a counselling role so as to specifically deal with her new found negative feelings. As I used my capacity as a student affairs professional in response to this student's troubles, she began her first concreate steps towards resolving them. She agreed to have subsequent meetings with me in my office and was able to use my help to acquire a more appropriate resource on the campus for extensive counselling around other issues pertaining to her self-image and relationships with others.

In other situations where I shifted my role from researcher to counselor, I did it from a clear recognition that some of the relevations about the lives of some of my subjects were extremely delicate. Such problems as sexual preference conflicts, differences with parents about future life plans, deep feelings of depression, and other emotional conflicts emerged during several of my research interviews. Some facets of these issues were indeed pertinent to my research questions with respect to all students interviewed and observed in this study. Yet, in the cases of this role shift, these students used the research attention to receive immediate help with their concerns. I was compelled

to forego my initial interests for interacting with them and relate as they demanded.

In one other case, the student abandoned the stated purpose of the interview soon after my arrival in his dorm room:

Student:	I've been looking forward to your meeting with me all day. I have a lot to talk to you about. I really enjoyed talking with you in the Commons the other night, and I know you can help me.
Interviewer:	Oh?
Student:	Yes, Yes. I need to talk to somebody. You seem like a good listener. See, its my mom and dad. They're very upset with me because I'm getting ready to drop out of this place....

As this excerpt reveals, somehow in the course of my participant observation with my subjects I unwittedly sent a message to some of them that I could be regarded as more than the mere researcher wanting to learn about the nature of Black student life at Penn. From this student's point of view, I was a good adult listener with whom he could share and ventillate a pressing problem. Accordingly, I responded to this projection of my observer presence in his life. I proceeded to hear out his concerns and offer advice on how he might begin to resolve some of the difficulty with his parents as well as some other matters related to his decision to leave school. Significantly, my response to this student's immediate need for some form of social development counseling served as a catalyst for his later

reception of my initial research interest in interviewing him. My professional intuitions told me that through the accomplishment of talking out one's pressing problems with a sympathetic other, the level of one's presently felt frustration is meaningfully eased. Thus, an openness to other involvements, such as fully participating in a ethnographic interview, is well facilitated.

Both of these descriptions connote that typical strategies for workable field relationships are not always benefitted by smooth, step-by-step frames of action. Rather, the researcher is sometimes called upon to use proficiencies not necessarily related to her reasons for meeting and talking with her subjects. This became a standard tenent underlying my dual role management in my setting; and I had to listen well for the indications that some students might be more concerened about connecting with me primarily on consideration of their own immediate life pressures and internal dilemmas work as a student affairs administrator who had duties related to some of the social development of Black students served me well in recognizing that some of them might have a special interest to be heard and seen in ways that would not always fit my anticipations of them as research subjects.

In the case of my subject's use of my presence in their lives for counseling purposes, I yielded to my intuition that their need for this was sometimes greater than my desire to maintain an organized exchange solely for the purposes of

my study. These students' throes of personal discord and emotional confusion mandated that I help them to sort things out, and to direct them to options seemingly more worthy of their strivings to be healthy, self-satisfied human beings. I saw no reason to evade nor ignore these unexpected encounters. I willingly relaxed my initial fieldwork schedule to service these subjects' call for counseling assistance.

Observers who discover themselves in this kind of situation should feel free to become the mature, significant other in this fairly brief moment of human need. Indeed, the observer can stand ready to give some help in countering disconcertions evident in their subjects' lives, especially if these troubles are stirred by the content of the ethnographic interview. However, the observer who discovers herself in demand for this role-shift is not urged to "for-all-time" relinquish her basic purpose for interacting in the lives of her subjects. Neutral and unbiased reactions to whatever the subject divulges to the observer as she moves through the field are still very optimal aids for eliminating any elements of observer distortions of what she hears and sees. The observer, consequently, must feel her own way through these events in conjunction with her sense and degree of professional decorum to facilitate this role shift.

My role management in this regard was guided by my awareness that my entry in some of my subjects' lives would engender their independent set of impressions and ideas

about my relationships to them; that they would naturally attempt to know me in terms of their own, specialized interests; and that they would more often than not seek to have social connections with me that were particularly self-rewarding and resolute. Therefore, I was quite comfortable in risking my penchant to be a totally objective scientist, and trusted that my capacity to switch hats in this way was appropriate.

The Observer As Informant And A Collaborator

The fact that some of my subjects were well aware of my access to information relative to matters important to their organizational or political interests and activities sometimes cast me in the role of informant. Throughout the entire period of this study, I was quite conscious of this aspect of my observational status among the students in their various social interactional groupings. Again, the realities of my primary life on the campus occasionally entered my research life in the eyes of my subjects, and I was promptly drawn into acts of providing some of them with knowledge apropos to their socio-political concerns at hand.

An instance of this role shift came about as I observed an informal discussion among a small group of students in one of the dormitory lounges. The discussion was centered on a speech given by a prominent Black national leader during his recent visit to the campus. I was eventually pressed to give my "expert's" data on the current statistics of Black faculty members, tenured and untenured,

and their department locations; the ratio of Black undergrads to white undergrads; and other facts about the Black presence at Penn. Prior to my becoming centrally involved in this discussion, I had indicated in my field notes my impressions of the seeming naivete of some of the students regarding the faculty and administrative structures on the campus and other matters related to Penn's Black population. No sooner had I completed jotting down a series of follow up questions to ask certain students participating in this discussion was I persistently requested to shed some light on the debate. Although I visibly resisted becoming the informant in this case -- e.g., suggesting other officials and documents which could be consulted (alas, even this response was an informing one) -- the students' insistence on my direct participation in this discussion reigned, and I found myself liberally providing data relevant to the questions being raised in it.

On other occasions, I was suddenly moved to the position of collaborator. An outstanding example of this posture occurred as I observed a meeting of the Black Student League (the major Black student activity group). There was much dispute among the members about the seeming apathy of the general body of Black students about the future direction of this organization. I had made extensive field notes about the varied political and sociological stances delineated by some of the speakers on the matter. Since I was aware that I held certain attitudes and values in reference to

the substance of this problem as it pertained to my official duties in behalf of all Black student organizations, I took great care to be as unobstrusive as I could in this meeting (e.g. deliberately sitting in the back of the room behind a robust male student) lest I inadvertantly convey my own concerns about this issue. However, I was pointedly cognizant that my presence was indeed felt by the students since some of them made eye contact with me, or especially mentioned my name as "someone who knows" in their comments. As the discussion proceeded I heard my name being called forth to give an opinion on the issue. I tried to good naturedly resist rendering any official comment (e.g., "c'mon y'all, I'm just here to listen;" "gimme a break, do you think I work twenty-four hours a day?"; and other such banterings). Still, I was lured into giving a rather comprehensive comment on the history of this organization and its relatively progressive problems of consistent student participation, and other applicable data about experiences of comparable organizations in other institutions. My provisions of this information helped validate for the students that the problem was somewhat generic, and seemed to lift the "pall of projected pessimism" (my characterization of the aura of this meeting in my analytic notes) among the students about the future of the organization. This meeting continued with my outright involvement in the deliberations and the specific planning about to how to elicit greater contributions from Black

students in the organization's activities. When I observed subsequent meetings of the group I noted that the tone of the discussions about the priority work of the membership and other related business seemed less imbued with intra-group rebukes, and were more focused on the external conditions which impacted on their organizational functioning.

Importantly, my role switch from observer to administrator giving information to Black student groups was not a projection of a need on my part to exhibit that I was a superior, better informed character in the social world of Black students. I had gone to great length to be on the alert for signs of whatever biases or preconceptions I might have brought to the filed so that they would not take precedence over my performance as an impartial researcher.

Moreover, I deeply understood that while I was watching and learning about the true nature of my subjects' world, they were quite properly watching and learning about me the researcher, me the University administrator, me the human being. It was mandatory that I "be cool", (as some Black students would probably term the notion of scientific objectivity) and allow the subjects to lead me through Penn from their vantage points rather than my operating my observer role from my administrative vision of its essence. There were several occasions where my subjects would give me information about a student organization's operations,

or about some University policy that I knew (from my occupational advantage) was incorrect or exaggerated. I successfully resisted any temptation I may have had to improve their perceptions simply because my purpose for talking with them was to learn of those perceptions.

I am reminded, here, of the directives in the related literature (see Scott, 1963, Goffman, 1959) that caution the observer in this respect: i.e., while the participant observer is most probably a knowledgeable, well conversant person on many of the situations in which she observes her subjects, she will generally not be able to express this status lest she be interpreted as having unsavory motives to expose the subject's ignorance; or as being in search of improper behavior. This prospect was particularly crucial to my image in the field as a neutral, trustworthy observer as that image connected with my work as a University official. For, I had already detected during the early stages of my study that some Black students had, at times, misinterpreted my administrative status as being a "token-Black" whose main job was to "keep the brothers and sisters straight". (Incidently, this was not a wide-spread perception, nor to my knowledge, a long held one). Consequently, it was very necessary that I present myself in the field from a standpoint of being the relatively affective, yet personally detached investigator and the University administrator committed to the overall well being of Black students.

The instances of my responding to subject-demands that I impart some of my specialized knowledg to their socio-political benefit were indicators of the appropriateness of that stance. While my researcher hat rendered me as a student seeking knowledge about the qualities of the human experience central to this study's concentration, I also held the expert's hat relative to some of the exceptional properties of that experience. My research role and my University official role in this regard could not avoid an intertwining perception by my subjects. Ergo, I saw nothing unethical nor distorting about providing knowledge so that they could better forward their organizational as well as individual pursuits. My ability to comply with this role switch was a necessary and suitable corollary to the exigencies these subjects felt impacting on their serious concerns about the historic and current Black bearing in this community. As I moved into this capacity, I trusted my instincts that told me that these involvements would facilitate my furthered understandings of my subjects' inner-life.

Observers (especially those who are in active and affective participation in a setting where they are also known to hold other official roles) can, indeed, relax any strict intent to become the "totally unaligned" researcher. The nature of participant observation in and of itself calls the investigator to emotionally and behaviorally react to the actions of her subjects in some form or fashion.

To present oneself as a completely unremarkable character in the course of the subjects' life events courts an unproductive impression that the observer is either gullible, or ameturish; or either inane or uncommitted (or some combination of all of these attributes) and thus unworthy of her subjects attention and time. Furthermore, such a stance could unintentionally convey to subjects that the observer has, in truth, a negative regard for their innerworkings; thereby, potentially causing inimical involvements in future areas of field relationships.

I realize that the informa /collaborator venture might be misconstrued by some field study practitioners as a total abandonment of the non-partison, scientifically objective stance that mobilizes this methodology. Such arguments are age-old in the historical development of this research approach (see Radin, 1933; Paul, 1953; Vidich, 1955). It seems apparent, however, that the participant observer who carries dual, and equally important, responsibilities in the study site should self-endorse the interdependence of her roles and selectively utilize them in behalf of her subjects. In so doing, the observer can draw out other cogent data that advances her comprehension of her subjects' social circumstances.

Observer as Teacher

Closely related to my subjects' perceptions of my role as informant/collaborator were their notions about my having educational expertise on the subject of institutional racism

in America. Many Black students were aware of my faculty status on the campus where I taught academic courses about racism; and, that throughout my years at Penn I had been appointed by several departments to conduct workshops engaging both student and staff in learning about the historical and current existence of this social problem. Since my chief employment in the Office of Student Life called for me to develop and implement a series of "racism awareness" programs for students, I also became someone who was often quoted in the campus news media and other public forums.

This particular aspect of my functioning on the campus sometimes generated a bit of controversy among certain members of the Penn community, and caused me to become more visible as a person who officially activated against the vestiges of racism on the campus. Most Black students knew of this controversy, and some came to my "defense" (as I was so informed) in a variety of ways, such as submitting letters to the editoral page of the campus newspaper; engaging in informal, yet heated, debates with white friends and associates; and having discussions among themselves about the issue. I made no public comment about the disagreements centering on some of the assumptions contained in my discourses on American racism. However, I soon became quite aware that such arguments had a tremendous impact on some of my subjects, and considerably affected the ways in which they chose to meet my requests for research-oriented involvements with them.

There were times during my participant observation when I was asked by some of my subjects to explain a concept related to racial problems in America; to give an expert opinion on the merits of books, articles, or print media accounts on the issue; or to lecture on the whole problem as is pertained to Blacks in the society, generally, or to Blacks specifically at Penn. The following excerpts, taken from interview data, illustrates this inclination. They are extracted from a tapped interview with a student leader who was, at the time, conducting a small survey for her sociology class on whether Black women considered their race or their sex to be the greater inhibitor in their lives:

Student: ...this survey I'm doing is really blowing my mind. I'm learning so much about the crazy things that are happening to us due to our race and our sex. That's one of the reasons I really wanted to talk with you... Let me show some of the things people are telling me... Here's the questionnaire I sent around.....

Interviewer: Wow! I'm really impressed with this work. Looks like you're reaching for all of the important things...Have you begun to draw some inferences about the problem from what people are telling you thus far?

Student: Yes I am. I know that most of the women think that racism is the biggest problem, but I'm not sure what that means yet because, also, a lot of women are downing the Black man and talk about the sexism that these men have.....

Interviewer: Well, it's a complex situation. Some research shows that a lot of Black women will put the problem they have with Black men as a problem of only sexism and not relate it to the problem of racism for both Black women and men. There's a good book I've just read...you could use some of its concepts to get at the complexity of this...

Student: O.K. That's the kind of stuff I was hoping you'd tell me. I knew that you knew a lot, and I really need you to help with some of this...I was at your workshop.....

The student gave an extensive account of what she learned from the workshop and revealed several gaps in her understanding of the concepts I was teaching which she questioned me about. My tapes of this interview exhibited my giving this student a mini-lecture on the nature of racism, suggestions for related readings, and some pointers on her research methodology. As the student and I talked further, a new twist to my teacher-role came about:

Student: I know for myself, living here as the only Black RA in this building, the things that happen to me that I can say has to do with my race or my sex, its the racism that comes out first [student gives many examples of this] ...I imagine that you get a lot of that too....

Interviewer: Yes, I know exactly what you mean. Throughout my life I've always felt that when I walk into a room with mostly white people, I'm first seen as a Black then as a woman.....

I proceeded to tell her of some of my "racism vs. sexism" experiences as well as the dilemmas I've sometimes felt in trying to determine which of the two, in certain situations, seemed most prevalent. This was an enormously growth producing exercise for me, especially when I realized that the student was taking notes as I spoke. We later joked with each other about our individual research interests during this interview.

It was apparent to me early in my interview with this student that her major motivation for agreeing to meet with me was to elicit my instructive expertise pertinent to her own research work as well as have me become a subject for her project. I did not view the student's motive in this situation as being deceitful nor dishonest; but rather, recognized it as one of her ways of "getting something for something" which was mutually beneficial.

I recognized that my standing as an academician, arising out of what my sujects perceived about my faculty based authoritative presence at Penn, served to unite my observer role with these students' educative process. Clearly, the subjects brought their own meanings of my relationship with them as it bore on their need for expanded intellectual enlightenment. My submissions to this role shift were grounded on my general recognition that subjects often need to engage in deliberate interactions

with the observer in manners that result in their receipt of definitive information relevant to increased wisdom about the cultural circumstances in which they operate their lives.

The role of participating scientist is not only an investigative one providing edifying knowledge to the scientific community. It is also a diversified position that often services the investigated's need for educative and evaluative information. My switching to the teacher-role that gave scholastic advantage to some of my subjects is representative of that diversity.

Participant observers should rightfully concern themselves with problems associated with objectivity, reliability, and validity in the course of their fieldwork. Yet, an over-concern with these matters to the point that the observer loses a natural responsiveness to her subjects' own initiated engagement with her threatens to defeat the ultimate goals of the study. As an observer studying about the nature of people and things in a setting in which I was also a member, I found in imperative to hold a view of myself as an alive, vibrant, academically endowed involver in the environment. The interactions between me and my subjects where the observer-as-teacher role arose is indicative of that view. It spurred increased data for my study thus providing me with more valuable information about the intriging world of Penn's Black students.

Conclusions

This discussion principally focused on the technique of switching roles during the course of conducting research in a setting where the researcher has other official duties. It pointed out the significant features of diversified nature of the participant observation process inherent in this type of researcher-role management, and the appropriateness of observer responses to subject demands for this shift. Utilizing some of the standard propositions regarding the multi-dimensions described my approach to wearing two hats in my study site.

The interactions with my subjects that most manifested my role shifts from researcher to University official highlights the uniqueness of research reciprocity in this dual role capacity. Typically, the relationship between the observer and her subjects is weighted by some sense of mutual reward. Both directly and indirectly a bond is made between ovserver and subjects that signifies a special give-and-take emphasis in their relationship. Accordingly, this bond requires the observer to "pay dues" (i.e. reciprocate) for her intrusion on the subjects' life-span in the setting. To pay dues in the manner of particularized responses to the affective, cognitive, or social developmental needs of the subject is not an unreasonable expectation given the observer's demands for subject-provided information, time opinions, and other

basic features of the study. This expectation seems especially appropriate if the researcher holds professional and academic credentials useful to her subjects.

Thus, my experience of role switching in response to Black students' needs for my skills as counselor, informant/collaborator, and teacher, encompassed in my administrative functioning on the campus, was also my way of paying dues as a researcher through my varied specialities. And why shouldn't I? After all, I was the "Blace-runner," the "procurer of racial justice on the campus," the sister for the cause!" (Actually these were characterizations of me recently pronounced by one rather exuberant Black-student leader as he introduced me to a group of his fraternity brothers visiting the campus. Characterizations, I might add, which I felt were rather excessive, and I said as much while shaking hands with these visitors. Besides, I know "BS" when I hear it!)

Nevertheless, these appelations heraled for me the intrinsic perceptions many of my subjects held about my "real place" in the Penn environment. As one of the few Black faculty and administrators on the campus, I represented someone special to many Black students. My presence as an official member of the institution's instructional and administrative structure implied something about my usefulness to the needs and interests of Black students at Penn; and, "Pay-back-is-a-dog" (to use the venacular of some of my subjects). Indeed, I

was compelled to switch hats: to allow ventilation of some of these students' personal difficulties in a manner which led to definite resolutions; to help allay their interpersonal anxieties; and to be a reliable resource person who could explicitly contribute to the furthered educational and social developmental growth of my subjects.

Finally, I must reiterate that as a Black researcher and a Black official in the University, I was both within and outside of my subject's cultural milieu. It was often apparent (as I've exemplified) that these role positions were mainly viewed by a number of my subjects as inseperable. Although, I was able to adequately switch hats when necessary, neither of these role presentations were of a "colorless" neutrality. This was an ambience that was ever present in my interactions with my subjects, and, the empathic quality of my relationships with them was the bridge that facilitated the management of my dual functioning in this field study.

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